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TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION ON CHILDREN TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

My name is Barbara Ruhe. I regret that I am unable to appear before you in person today due to other commitments. I wish to submit this written testimony in support of continued funding for the Commission on Children in connection with the Governor's proposed budget adjustments.

I have been a child advocate in this state for 33 years. My advocacy has primarily been as a lawyer, but I am not a stranger to advocacy in the legislature or the political arena.

In December of 2008 Senator John McKinney appointing me to serve on the Commission on Children as a "private citizen who has demonstrated an interest in children's issues" to serve on the Commission on Children. I was aware that the Commission existed, but had no real understanding as to what they did. In fact in November of 2008 I had written Governor Rell a lengthy letter commenting on agencies, boards and commissions that involved children's issues and articulating where I thought cuts could be made and where services could be provided in a more fiscally responsible manner. In that letter I stated the following:

The Commission on Children--\$1,010,973—I have no clue what they do.

Prevention? Education? Have lots of meetings? They certainly have a lot of staff.

I was initially very skeptical as to the function and benefits of the Commission. My skepticism quickly turned to admiration as I came to understand that this was not a commission that "just" held meetings or wrote reports. It is a commission that does things.

One of the many practical things the Commission on Children does is help enhance the function of families through a Parent Leadership Training Institute program. The Commission provides valuable information to the public and the legislature about raising healthy children and children's needs in a wide realm of areas. It provides the legislature with information about programs and funding streams that enhance the lives of children and their families. The Commission on Children is an invaluable resource to the General Assembly.

Since my appointment to the Commission its budget has been slashed in half and currently stands at just over half a million dollars----\$516,926. There are now 5 employees who are mostly part time due to the last round of budget cuts. The commission is a modest agency with a low profile that has brought \$9.25 million of federal funds to the state through the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Employment and Training Reimbursement Program* (SNAP E&T). The Commission found the SNAP E & T program and triggered its implementation in consultation with other branches of state and local government. Under SNAP E&T, job-training providers may be eligible to receive a 50-cent federal match for every dollar they spend on services that help food

stamp recipients find regular employment. A wide range of services qualify. Examples include helping food-stamp recipients secure high-school-equivalency diplomas, providing English-as-a-second-language classes and providing child care and transportation for parents in school. Due to SANP E&T the Commission has brought in \$17.89 in Federal funds--that Connecticut would otherwise not have received-- for every dollar of it's current budget. ($\$9,250,000 / \$516,926 = \$17.89$).

Per the 2000 census there are 812,290--23.2% of our population--children under 18 in Connecticut. The Commission on Children operates at a cost of \$.64 a child. The Commission provides preventive services. By way of contrast DCF with its budget of \$869,271,516 expends \$1,070 per child in the state--most of the child and family contacts with DCF could have been avoided if we did decent preventive work in this state.

I urge each of you to visit the following on the Commission's web site entitled:

Two Dozen Years of Landmark Policy, Proven Practice, and Return on Investment
http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/about/COC_factsheet.pdf

The Commission on Children at the Cutting Edge
http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/about/cutting_edge_080409.pdf

See for your self the positive things the Commission does--things of nominal cost to the State that provide big benefits. Elaine Zimmerman, the Executive Director, of the Commission will have provided you with the hard data on the work of the Commission in her formal testimony before this committee. I would urge you to review that data carefully.

Without the work and technical assistance of the staff of the Commission on Children this income stream of Federal dollars designed to help those families and their children most affected by the recession will most likely cease which would place an even larger burden on the State of Connecticut.

I am well aware of the financial crisis that the State of Connecticut is facing. Programs that do not produce or that are window dressing should be eliminated. I do not believe it is fiscally responsible to eliminate a commission that produces a profit that is 17 times its cost. The programs that the Commission supports represent a "hand up" not a "hand out". When we provide a "hand up" to families that benefit their children I believe that we prevent significant future expenses for things like the criminal justice system, the child welfare system and further dependency on government programs.

Children "neither vote nor pay taxes nor have high priced lobbyists at the State Capitol". In remarks at the Jamestown Exposition of 1907, Teddy Roosevelt, the president that organized the first White House conference on children, put it well when he said:

"The nation's most valuable asset is the children; for the children are the nation of the future. All people alive to the nation's need should join together to work for the moral, spiritual, and physical welfare of the children in all parts of our land."

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please feel free to call me at (860)997-5619 if you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance.

Truly yours


Barbara J. Ruhe